

## A Week of Collecting in Tenerife, Canary Islands, in September 1977

By H. G. ALLCARD, F.R.E.S.<sup>1</sup> and A. VALLETTA, F.R.E.S.<sup>2</sup>

We met at the Mencey Hotel at Santa Cruz de Tenerife late in the afternoon of the 6th September, as owing to the industrial action in the British airports, both of us had some delay in our departures from Manchester, Ringway and Gatwick respectively.

Our main objectives were to get the endemic species of butterflies, especially *Gonepteryx cleobule* Huebner and *Pseudotergumia wyssii* Christ, though for A.V. any species would do as this was his first visit to the island. We prepared our itinerary for the next day over a cup of tea and hoped for the best.

At 9.30 a.m. on Wednesday the 7th, our friend Señor M. Morales Martin and his son called at the hotel to take us out in his car on Monte de las Mercedes, which is the habitat of the *G. cleobule*. We drove through the old city of La Laguna under a clear sky, but as soon as we reached the mountains we had to put on our jerseys and jackets as it was much cooler. To our dismay, we found ourselves enveloped in mist, and as visibility was down to a few yards had to give up at that spot. Therefore we drove to Cumbe de Arafo at an altitude of 1,700 m., which was not in the cloud belt, and where some wild flowers were still blooming, mostly the Californian poppy (*Eschscholtzia californica*). Here *Cyclurius webbianus* Brullé, *L. phlaeas* Fab., *P. rapae* L. and *M. jurtina* L. were on the wing. A.V. could not resist turning over some rocks, and luckily came across a few of the large earwig *Annisolatis maxima* Brullé and some beetles, all *Heteger transversus* Brullé, which are only found on this island. The huge fly *Promachus vexator* Beck (Diptera, Asilidae) was quite common, darting from twig to twig, but was not easy to net.

At about 11.30 we drove higher, about 2,000 m., on slopes covered with *Pinus insignis* and *Pinus canariensis*. It was too hot there and one could see no sign of the panorama, for we were now above the clouds as though in an aircraft. Whilst turning a bend of the road, a brownish butterfly flitted rapidly before us and rested on the wall. We became suspicious and stopped, and there was the much desired *P. wyssii*. This butterfly is not easy to take in flight as it moves so rapidly, but when it alighted on a wall or the road we were able to do so, though we had to strike fast and hard. Most of the species seen had already passed their best, but we enjoyed ourselves manoeuvring our nets and testing our strokes! In this locality we also came across *P. daplidice* Fab. and *C. croceus* Fourc., and an odd *C. webbianus* and *L. phlaeas*. After an enjoyable cold lunch and a well deserved rest, we visited a much lower place at some 1,400 m. known by the name of Las Lagunetas. Whilst H.G.A. was seeking *Pandoriana pandora* Denis & Schiffer-

<sup>1</sup> "The Paddock", 164 Brooklands Road, Sale, Cheshire, M33 3PA.

<sup>2</sup> 257 Msida Street, B'Kara, Malta, G.C.

müller, A.V. was impressed by the large number of Orthoptera that infested the dry vegetation and succeeded in taking, during the space of a few minutes, *Calliptamus plebeius* (Walk.), *Oedalus decorus* (Germ.), *Aiolopus thalassinus* (Fab.), *Acrotylus patruellis* (H.-S.) and the endemic mantid *Pseudodoyersina teydeana* Chop. Only a few *A. cramera* Eschscholtz f. *canariensis* Bell, *L. phlaeas*, *P. rapae* and one *P. pandora* were seen, and that was all for the day . . . not many butterflies but at least we took one of the two most sought-after species.

On Thursday the 8th, we again drove to Monte de las Mercedes, but still no luck, with visibility very bad, cold weather and overcast sky. After a two-hour drive which brought us to the same place where the *P. wyssii* was taken the previous day, conditions were much better, but to our disappointment only two worn specimens of this butterfly were seen and one *P. pandora* taken, and one *Vanessa indica vulcania* Latreille & Godart, which unfortunately escaped whilst being transferred from the net to the killing bottle. In the later afternoon we visited again Cumbe de Arafo, hoping to see *P. pandora* but only the same two lycaenids seen on the previous day were on the wing.

Friday the 9th, still the Mercedes Mountains were covered by cloud, so we took the long journey to Puerto de la Cruz on the other side of the island, and collected at a height of 100 to 200 m. Though cloudy, it was quite warm, and visiting the flowers of the bougainvillea, plumbago and lantana, we now and again saw *Danaus plexippus* L., *Catopsilia florella* Fab. and *P. cheiranthi* Huebner. Flying a few inches above the ground we also came across *Ziziera knysna* Trimer and *P. xiphioides* Staudinger, zigzagging underneath the hibiscus and poinsettias, whilst several species of dragonflies were hovering over dried vegetation.

Saturday the 10th—conditions on the Mercedes still the same. Once more we went to Puerto de la Cruz. This time, spotting some pupae of *P. cheiranthi* high up on a wall, and fastening our net sticks together, with a knife attached at one end, we managed to cut down three pupae which a few days later turned into beautiful female butterflies. Beneath some nasturtium leaves, we found batches of eggs of the same species of butterfly. Later in the day, we searched for eggs and larvae of *C. florella* on the Cassia, and succeeded in finding some larvae in different stages of development, one ready to pupate and others just hatched. The butterflies seen on the previous day were still flying about, but in fewer numbers as the weather was less encouraging.

Sunday the 11th—at long last a clear sky with plenty of sunshine on the Mercedes. We spent the whole day there collecting at an altitude of 800-1,000 m. Occasionally *G. cleobule* left the extensive plantations of *Laurus azorica* (Seub.) Franco, *Erica scoparia* and *E. arborea*, *Rhamnus glandulosa* and crossed the road seeking the flowers of *Rubus ulmifolius* Schott and those of *Hypericum glandulosum* and *H. canariense* bushes, which formed hedges along the road.

There we were able to take a few, notwithstanding the heavy traffic on a Sunday afternoon. It was quite natural that the butterflies were looking for flowers to quench their thirst after at least a whole week in hiding. In this area, *C. webbianus* was just emerging and fairly common, together with *C. croceus* and its form *helicina*, *P. daplidice* and *P. rapae*. Only one *V. indica vulcania* was seen resting on a high branch of a *Rhamnus* tree. Here again A.V. wanted to get other insects and netted the Cerambyx, *Leptura palmi* and the Staphilinid *Creophilus maxillosus* ssp. *canariensis*, as well as five species of hymenoptera, viz. *Bombus terrestris* ssp. *canariensis*, *Thyreus histrionicus*, *Vespa germanica*, *Ammophila teydei* and *Ancistrocesus* sp. and one species of diptera, a Bombylid, *Villa nigrifrons* Macq. Tired and almost exhausted, but quite satisfied with the catch after four days of expectation, we retired to the hotel late in the afternoon looking forward to a refreshing bath.

Monday the 12th. After the previous day's encouragement we drove again to the Mercedes, but no sooner had we reached the first collecting spot, than clouds came moving in and it soon started to rain; so we had to return to the hotel and set what we had collected so far. During the dull afternoon, we visited the Museum of Natural History and had a chat with the curator and his assistant. A.V. had the opportunity to identify the endemic species of insects he had taken.

Tuesday the 13th — the best day of the whole week! It was unfortunately also the day of our departure; however, we were not to leave before 3 p.m. though we had to be at the airport at 2 p.m. We had an early breakfast, checked out from the hotel, put the luggage in the boot of a taxi and off we went to Las Mercedes. There was *G. cleobule* again, not in good numbers, but more were seen than on Sunday, mostly females. This time we were less troubled by traffic. By the edges of the wood *P. xiphioides* was seen several times, but mostly much worn. We kept an eye on the watch and by 1.55 p.m. we were at the airport, only to learn that both our planes had an hour's delay. By 4.30 p.m. we were both in the air but on different planes, watching carefully the hand luggage which contained our catch of the week, souvenirs of a happy and restful week on the mountainous island of Tenerife.

### Acknowledgements

Our thanks are due to Señor M. Morales Martin, for taking us round in his car to the best collecting grounds, and for identifying the Orthoptera taken. We are also indebted to the curator of the Museum, Dr. F. Fernandez, and to his assistant for all the facilities given to us during our short visit.

### References

Baynes, E. S. A., 1961. Canary Island Butterflies. *Entomologist*, **94**: 260-262.

- Bramwells, David and Bramwells, Zoe, 1974. *Wild Flowers of the Canary Islands*. Stanley Thornes (Publishers) Ltd., London and Burford.
- Bretherton, R. F., 1966. A Distribution List of the Butterflies (Rhopalocera) of Western and Southern Europe. *Transactions of the Society for British Entomology*, 17, Part 1.
- Gangwere, S. K., Morales, Martin M. and Morales, Agacino E., 1972. The Distribution of the Orthopteroides in Tenerife. Contributions of the American Entomological Institute. Vol. 8, nbr. 1, 1972.
- Gaydon, A. C., 1972. April Butterflies in Tenerife. *A.E.S. Bulletin*, 31: 106.
- Guichard, K. M., 1965. Butterflies in the Canary Islands. *Entomologist*, 98: 194-195.
- \_\_\_\_\_, 1967. Butterflies of the Canary Islands. *Entomologist*, 100: 293-299.
- Higgins, L. G. and Riley, N. D., 1970. *A Field Guide to the Butterflies of Britain and Europe*. Collins.
- Manley, W. B. L. and Allcard, H. G., 1970. *A Field Guide to the Butterflies and Burnets of Spain*. E. W. Classey Ltd.

#### ACHERONTIA ATROPOS L., THE DEATH'S HEAD HAWK MOTH.

— In the December issue of *The Record*, C. G. M. de Worms records a specimen of this moth from near Guildford. I also took this species several times near Cranleigh and on one occasion I had a female that was found on the outside of a modern beehive (which of course is quite useless for entry by this moth). More recently, here at steeple Barton, I have two records: first, a female was brought to me which had been found in a bedroom. I was interested because this room was in fact in an old-fashioned cottage and the bedroom never had a light on. I enquired whether there were any bees in the roof and this immediately drew the response that there had been, for years, a large bees' nest there. More recently I obtained a male in my m.v. trap here at Steeple Barton. I took it down to the cellar where there was complete silence and there recorded its violent stridulations which occurred every time I touched it. I played the recording to Professor Pringle of the Department of Zoology, Oxford (who is an authority on bees). He had never heard these stridulations before; yet he immediately said, "it sounds to me exactly like the 'piping' of a queen bee".

At a later date I took the recording up to the steeple of our local church where a very large nest of bees had lived for some years. Unfortunately, I got no results because it was too late in the season, and the temperature was low. I think there is a considerable amount of work to be done on this species and its extraordinary life history. Why is the tongue so different from that of other sphingids? Why does the pupa stridulate? It seems to me to have a highly specialised life history adapted to the bee, yet both sexes of *atropos* have been found "stung to death" in bees' nests. It is surprising that it has not been taken at "sugar" in this country (so I believe).

I have taken the species in S. Africa and elsewhere in southern latitudes, and it appears to me that the stridulation and activity there is greater than those I have seen in this country. — Dr. H. B. D. KETTLEWELL, M.A., D.Sc., M.B., B.Chir., M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P.